

GURU NANAK DEV JI AND CHUNGTHUNG

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My memory harks back to nearly a distance of two decades when during a formal discussion amongst a group of friends, I could gather that there was some historical site in the deep dales of the perennially snow-shrouded Himalayas in the north of Sikkim associated with the hallowed name of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, and his foot-prints, which attract the faith and adoration of the local Buddhist population, young and old alike. Guru Nanak Dev Ji is remembered there as Narak Ghashmi-Rimpochee or Nanak Lama Guru.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji with his life-long companion, Bhai Mardana, the Muslim rebeck Player and the blissful singer of Guru Nanak's celestial Gurbani, is believed to have stopped in the Himalayan region, there during one of his four odysseys of the then worshipful places of both the Hindu and Muslim religions in India as well as the Muslim dominated regions of the West Asian countries. The local inhabitants of the area, steeped in the mesh of the interminable wheel of KARMA and Karuna (life actions and submissive poverty) complained to Guru Nanak Dev Ji of their failure to exhort the Mother-Earth, despite their available material and physical endeavours, to grow rice which was their staple food. The Compassionate One, out of his plenitude of mercy,

blessed the soil to produce paddy to relieve the suffering of the people.

It is a matter of great significance and glory that our Sikh defence personnel, officers as well as ranks while defending the borders of the motherland, have been instrumental in the discovery of many a historical places consecrated during the peregrinations of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1497-1522). And Chungthung, an isolated village of about a hundred hamlets then, was similarly discovered by the border surveillance detachment of the Indian army sometime during 1960s.

I could then hardly imagine that one day I would visit the place. This happened on the 2nd January of the year 1982, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. My son-in-law, an army Major Medical Officer, scheduled for duty in the Nathu La region of the high Himalayas where even the clouds float much below our habitation, assisted me my consort, his mother and family to drive from Gangtok to Chungthung at about 3 a.m. in the morning braving cold and sleet, reaching Chungthung, 6000 feet above sea level, at about 8 a.m. to be available for participation in the Gurpurb celebrations.

Gangtok, the beautiful city of the beautiful, buxom, pithy and fair mountain people of Sikkim, is perched with fascinating colourful nest-like houses designed to rest one over the other, four to five storeys high, on the mountain ribs, spaced by autumn-resistance cloud-kissing trees. It is linked with a hundred kilometer metalled

military-managed meandering road with Siliguri, Railway station of the South-Eastern Division of the Indian Railways.

The zig-zag road with many a U and blind turns, crossing over many a hanging bridges, is an adventurous experiment for the new visitor of the area. The road is carved beside the mountain ribs with very tall evergreen saal, teak and pine trees on one side and romantic, rebellious and turbulent steep gradient Teesta river on the other side. The bus journey keeps, at least the old and the weak flirting with Death. The entire journey is very dangerous and breath-taking. Any time, God Forbid if the very conscious driver misses a beat of his pulse, even by a split second, the entire paraphernalia, animate and inanimate, is devoured nearly by 300-feet deep ravines for good. But the drivers are very courageous human beings who manoeuvre their machines on every curve with ingenuity classical for their genre.

We meet on the way practically, an endless trek of tourist buses, military convoy vehicles loaded with logistics to maintain the comforts of our Jawans who, away from their families, look after the inaccessible recesses of the high Himalayas.

Chungthung is equidistance from Gangtok to its north. The road is gaining its full worthiness gradually with the untiring zeal of the labourers, mostly urchins and women, who trek every morning in the biting sleet, scantily clad and barefooted from their small poorly huts lined beside the road they are building. They

leave in the morning in the whiz of the hymn-printed-prayer flags, 20 to 30 feet high, on the skirts of each village and which are believed to waft the Buddha's message of peace to the lands the wind blows them to.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, with Bhai Mardana, while returning from Assam planned to reach Gurdumba, a deep perennially frozen lake at the height of 18,000 feet, where his invisible help was sought by the local isolated residents for provision of drinking water, near the border of China,

While crossing over the mountains rough track, Guru Nanak Dev Ji passed by Yumthung, a hot-water spring at the height of 17,000 ft. I was told that the Indian and foreign tourists frequent this place in summer. The government has provided a small inspection Bungalow for periodical survey of the area.

Onwards Guru Nanak Sahib is said to have encountered a demon who objected to Guru Sahib's passing through his exclusive principality. Guru Ji tried to assure him of the innocence of his mission, but the devil persisted in being unruly. Guru Nanak Dev Ji just aimed his walking stick locally named as Parkha or *Babe-di-Khoondi*, at the demon, and, lo, a furious gush of hot air jetted forth from the stick and pushed back the demon dazed jamming him to the mountain side, Guru Nanak Dev Ji trekked forward to Chungthung, situated in about 30 acres of plain area sentinelled by high cliffs on three sides..

Guru Sahib after resting awhile, asked Bhai Mardana to start the Kirtan. This again agitated the ego of the demon. In utter disgust and with the sense of vendetta, he hurled a big boulder, measuring about 30 feet in diameter and 20 feet height, with a view to smashing Guru Nanak Dev Ji and his companion. The stone with its heavy weight stuck deep into the earth. It reminds one of Wali-Kandhari's event at Hasan Abdaal-Punja Sahib (now in Pakistan).

Taking advantage of the high seat provided by the boulder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji climbed up the roof of the stone and commenced his Kirtan there. This attracted a large gathering of the local residents, who listened Gurbani in rapt silence. The melodious divine songs mellowed the demon as well, and in deep contrition he came down and begged pardon for his misdemeanour. Miraculously while climbing up the boulder, Guru Sahib's wooden Kharava cut deep impressions in the stones in three to four places. This marvelled the local people and added to their devotion manifold.

Later, in the memory of this event they raised a small Gumpa or temple of Nanak Lama near the boulder. The present temple is a small two-roomed wooden structure perched on four-feet-high teak wood pillars for protection against rain water inflow. I was told that one of the rooms houses Guru Nanak Sahib's picture in front of which a perpetual lamp is lit fed with pure ghee. In the other, the Lama in attendance rests.

While on the mound the residents witnessed Guru Nanak Dev Ji enjoying the repast of rice, a very rare commodity then for the people of the village. They complained to Guru Sahib of the non-availability of rice in that area. Guru Nanak Dev Ji sprinkled the rice left over from his meal and it is believed that the present abundance of the quality paddy in the area is Guru's blessing.

The devotees, Buddhists, with deep reverence, place small clay replica of stupas in the niches of the stone. There is a constant oozing of transparent water in a chasm about 8''×3'' which the residents believe is the flow from a lake underneath the stone. The water is taken by the visitors as a sacrament—*parshad*. It is also believed that Nanak Lama's one sacred book, one overall (*Chola*) and some gold things are safely kept in a cave beneath the stone. The door, which is permanently blocked, will be opened by him only on his reappearance in this world.

Near the present gurdwara hall about 50 feet by 30 feet, there is a Tiloni wood tree in the shape of reversed 'L' which is believed to be *bahe-di-Khoondi* which the Guru stuck on his departure as a memento of his historic visit. The *Khoondi* became a living tree and reminds one of '*bahe-di-ber*' at Sultanpur Lodhi which has grown from Guru Nanak Sahib's *Daaten* given to sufi dervish, Kharboozey Shah, as a memento before Guru Nanak Dev Ji left the place for his first pad-yatra in 1497 AD.

Gurdamba lake is equally a site of great miracle. It is believed that on the request of the local residents to provide them with drinking water round the year. Guru Nanak Dev Ji threw some beads of his rosary on the surface of the frozen lake. Instantly the snow parted and an area of 12 feet by 3 feet of the frozen lake turned into transparent water as a permanent feature. It is believed that the sacred portion has the blessings of imparting fertility and grant of male issue to women who happen to lack these gifts. People, who visit the place, fetch bottles full of the sacred water for such benefits.

Subedar-Major Gian Singh Bhullar, who looked after the area, confirmed this event. He also told me that with the help of Major Lakhwant Singh they have erected a Nishan Sahib near the lake and have also placed Guru Nanak Sahib's photo near the Khalsa Flag, to keep the memory of this rare event till the consecrated lake-water benefits the devotees and the defenders of the borders of the motherland.

All these miraculous events attracted the devotion of the Sikh defence personnel. They gradually managed to acquire some land in the vicinity of the Boulder and raised Gurdwara in 1977. Practically all the officers and jawans in the area congregate to celebrate the Gurpurbs. There is a large gathering specially on Guru Nanak Sahib's birthday celebrations.

During our visit, Subedar-Major Gian Singh Bhullar, an officer of 17 Assam Rifles, with his jawans was looking after the management and construction work of the Gurdwara. He is very sincere and devoted Gutsikh and had been kind enough to look after comforts for our night's stay. This place is a Protected Area and ordinarily needs regular permit to visit the holy place. However donations and other material help needed for the Gurdwara can reach there for keeping the place grow day by day.

